

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

Inquiry into the financial administration of homelessness services in

Western Australia

Agencies for South West Accommodation Inc. – Trading as Accordwest

Overview

Accordwest seeks to highlight the recent experience of the people we serve in the South West of Western Australia as far as we can see and the experience of the organisation during the homelessness and social and affordable housing crisis impacting Western Australia.

The evidence of systemic letdown of social and affordable housing supply as a segment of housing market supply is undeniable. This disappointment has been intensified by the Global Pandemic that has further distressed the most vulnerable people of Western Australia who reach out or who are referred to homelessness services system providers for support.

Accordwest has been inundated with requests for help and have been under relentless pressure during the Global Pandemic. This pressure is mainly from an increase in the volume of the number of people we would generally anticipate need service and from new segments of our community. Labour Market shortages have created a very difficult environment for attracting and retaining employees who will work in the homelessness services sector and for people who would build social and affordable houses.

These challenges have coincided with an increase in case complexity and the implementation of the state commissioning strategy and the Homeless service system Trial in the South West, that is set to inform the 'All Paths Lead to a Home', Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030.

Accordwest in the Community.

Understanding the significance of Accordwest and our services is instrumental to understanding where our success comes from. With broader understanding comes an appreciation of the many contributing factors affecting the people we serve and their everyday lives in their local community. Our role is to assist people to live the lives they choose to live. In essence, Accordwest help people cope with the stresses of daily living.

Proud to be here

Accordwest is a Not for Profit social services provider based in South Western Australia. With a long history of grassroots, place based and culturally appropriate community support and advocacy. Our wraparound services assist people when they need it most. We appreciate everyone experiences their own unique circumstances that leads them to where they are today and are proud to be there for people across WA's South West, from the South Metro region down to Manjimup and beyond.

Our grassroots story

For almost 40 years Accordwest has been actively working within our local community. Established in 1983 as BUNYAP (Bunbury Youth Accommodation Program), we initially formed as an accommodation provider for young people aged 16 to 25 at risk of homelessness. Year-on-year, our dedication to providing support and advocacy to our local community has led to the expansion of our services which now sit proudly under the Accordwest umbrella.

A comprehensive community service

Our ambitions have steadily grown into comprehensive community services including Emergency Relief, Counselling, Housing Support and homelessness services, Youth Crisis Accommodation, Transitional Housing and Community Reintegration programs. We also support children/youth in need of residential care, Foster Care and family group home placements. Our belief that 'Every Story Matters' guides everything we do as we encourage our clients to be more engaged, connected and resilient as they build their abilities to live a strong, independent and meaningful life.

A part of our community

As a South West organisation, we're local. We live local, employ local, train local and develop local. We deeply understand the needs, priorities, wants and concerns of our community. So it's no surprise the collective purpose of our entire Accordwest team is to support those experiencing (or at risk of experiencing) hardship and disadvantage. We unbiasedly celebrate people of different cultures and backgrounds. We actively listen and understand. We care and respect the individual needs of the people we serve. We are a part of the community and strive to make impactful decisions that benefit people locally. Ours is a vision of hope, equity, community and belonging where 'Every Story Matters'.

Helping those who need it most

Advocacy and support play an important role in Accordwest's local community presence. Our wraparound services champion how we will continue to assist people when they need it most.

This is a time when they need advocacy and it is most important for Government to be informed.

Homelessness Services

In the 2021 financial year we provided accommodation for 130 people aged 15 to 25 years old, accessed accommodation for 393 Adults (over 26 years) and families, provided transitional housing for 149 people and supported 144 in maintaining their private tenancy.

Homelessness leads to debilitating circumstances that have the potential to cause someone's life to fall apart. Without a safe and secure home, it's very hard to maintain or gain employment. For families, it can be difficult to support children and keep them healthy and engaged in education. We seek to break the cycle of homelessness by providing tangible supports and housing solutions to our clients.

Families and Children

In 2021 we provided support to 104 young people, helping them stay connected with their families and build on their education.

The foundations of a stronger community lie in happy, healthy families. To strengthen relationships, we positively build the family environment through our Reconnect, Family and Relationships, and Child and Parenting programs. As a service providing counselling and education programs to both adults and children, our programs are a robust tool for families to learn and grow as cohesive units.

Release Support

In the 2021 financial year we provided specialist supports to 458 people leaving prison and facilitated 14,244 visits through the Family Visitor Centre.

Being released from prison can often be a challenging experience. Release Support is a wraparound service offering clients guidance and sustainable options upon re-entering their local community. We provide tools to assist in a positive transition into work, home and family life, and community involvement. Our comprehensive services offer different levels of support, each with a goal to reduce the rate of recidivism.

Emergency Relief

In the 2021 financial year we provided support for 2,905 families and distributed \$213,885 in food and fuel vouchers.

Every person who seeks Emergency Relief comes to us for different reasons. For those in need, Emergency Relief delivers vital relief to members of the community seeking urgent support. This could look like vouchers for everyday items to help get a meal on the table, urgent utility bill assistance or aid in filling essential medical prescriptions. Our person-centred and solution focused approach connects clients to a wide (and growing) range of support services when they need it most.

Children & Youth Services

In the 2021 financial year we provided Children & Youth Services for 121 children who were unable to live with their parents. We currently operate 46 residential houses and have provided over 21,556 nights of care.

Every child deserves to grow up in an environment that's consistent, safe and supportive. Our Children & Youth Services are intended to aid vulnerable and traumatised children building pathways to a more stable life. We house a comprehensive range of programs including Specialised Foster and Transitional High Needs, Family Group Homes and Foster Care extending from Peel and South Metro down to the Southwest regions.

A provider to rely on

Accordwest continues to plan and take courageous impactful decisions that ripple positively throughout our community. This drive has cemented our organisation's success and its income's growth year-on-year, putting Accordwest in a good financial position. Not only does this provide ongoing employment security for staff, it has also seen the organisation increase in size, confirming Accordwest is a strong, stable service provider that can be relied on.

The current funding and delivery of services

This story is about an organisation that is experiencing exponential growth in demand from people it can help and people it cannot help. It is expected that this demand will not change until fundamental reforms are put in place and brought to fruition to provide more social and affordable housing and there is a correction to the impact of the Global pandemic.

In recent months the increase in inflation and the increase in oil prices are signals that the remainder of 2022 will be even more challenging for the disadvantaged and vulnerable people of the South West of Western Australia and people in the same circumstances across our nation.

The facts show the number of people we have provided a service period for has fluctuated over the last 5 years based on the supply of our case workers and homes and Accordwest has responded more recently by redirecting resources to management of the intake process due to the volume of inquiries through our regional service hub.

This increase is of particular concern and has required a dynamic approach to service design and delivery over the last 2 years during the global pandemic and through the moratorium on rent increases and tenancy evictions, brought in by the WA State Government in 2020.

The 5 tables below show summary level detail of the funding and delivery of Accordwest programs in Homelessness Services. The attraction of our broad service model and regional service hub in Bunbury, located next to the Department of housing office and our reach through our Case workers and Team leaders located in Busselton and working remotely across the region is also evidenced.

Key notes on interpretation of the 5 tables;

Support periods is the count of the times a person or a family has been assigned a Case worker and been assisted, this includes people who have been assisted with transitional social housing accommodation that Accordwest manages on behalf of the state and Bunyap house youth crisis accommodation.

Support FTE is comprised of our regional service hub client services team members and Team leaders. The importance of the client services employees cannot be understated when managing calls and call volume and online inquiries in a sensitive way. Taking into account the needs of a person as a whole and referring people internally and externally to appropriate services and providing information akin to a one stop shop aligning to a no wrong door approach, this is essential work.

Unassisted clients are people who we cannot assist due a multitude of reasons including but not limited to eligibility criteria. Many that need to be referred to another provider or we help them in other ways. They may find we cannot help them with accommodation, or we cannot help them in the time frame they need, sometimes they just need someone to hear their story to and that helps them to orient towards a solution they chose. This additional support for people in our community who are not necessarily assigned a case worker is a service that we feel is very important to many people facing difficult choices.

Unexpended funds are grants that have been carried forward since the block funding was first provided. These include an element of savings that Accordwest Board may choose to invest in covering or funding shortfalls and to bolster services. As custodians of these funds Accordwest believes in innovation and investing in solutions in partnership with the community.

Table 1.

Bunbury Accommodation Services (BAS)		Financial Year Ends				
Financial Operating Results		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
						Budget
Funding						
Annual Funding		\$ 462,259	\$ 444,861	\$ 473,476	\$ 517,260	\$ 514,482
Prior Period Unexpended Funds		\$ 56,270	\$ 166,677	\$ 180,594	\$ 220,290	\$ 275,342
Total Funding		\$ 518,529	\$ 611,538	\$ 654,070	\$ 737,550	\$ 789,824
Expenditure						
Labour		\$ 182,191	\$ 330,732	\$ 326,057	\$ 375,130	\$ 424,578
All Other		\$ 169,660	\$ 100,211	\$ 107,723	\$ 87,078	\$ 119,425
Total Expenditure		\$ 351,851	\$ 430,943	\$ 433,780	\$ 462,208	\$ 544,003
Surplus / (Deficit)		\$ 166,678	\$ 180,595	\$ 220,290	\$ 275,342	\$ 245,821
Staffing						
FTE - Contract		2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1
FTE - Organisational Budget		3.5	3.8	3.8	3.9	4.1
Accordwest % Utilisation of Unexpended Funds (FTE)		64%	82%	80%	86%	97%
FTE Assumptions						
Case Workers		2.2	2.9	2.7	2.8	2.8
Team Leaders & Support		1.3	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.3
Total FTE		3.5	3.8	3.8	3.9	4.1
FTE - Case Worker To Support Ratio %		64%	76%	72%	72%	68%
Bunbury Accommodation Services (BAS)						
Client Activity (In Calendar Years - Per SHIP Reporting)						
Bunbury & Collie Transitional Accommodation Services						
Average Active Support Periods / Clients Over The Year		34	38	58	67	
Total New Support Periods in Year		320	193	332	332	
Average Duration of Support Period		39	72	64	74	
Collie Transitional Accommodation Services Only						
Average Active Support Periods / Clients Over The Year		n/a	5	10	15	
Total New Support Periods in Year		n/a	10	52	95	
Average Duration of Support Period		n/a	77	70	59	
Bunbury Accommodation Services (BAS)						
Unassisted Clients						
By Request						
Other Housing or Accommodation Request / Not Stated		44	67	120	347	
Accommodation - Short Term / Emergency Accomodation		9	22	23	140	
General Assistance and Support (Including Specialised Services)		3	8	3	88	
Total Unassisted Clients By Request		56	97	146	575	
By Unassisted Reason						
Other / Not Stated		19	72	85	217	
Outside Agency's Services		23	9	22	143	
Person Did Not Accept Service		8	14	34	128	
No Accommodation Available		6	2	5	87	
Total Unassisted Clients By Reason		56	97	146	575	

Table 2.

<u>Capes Accommodation Support and Advocacy Services (CASA)</u>		<u>Financial Year Ends</u>				
<u>Financial Operating Results</u>		<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u> Budget
Funding						
Annual Funding		\$ 145,885	\$ 141,084	\$ 148,542	\$ 158,380	\$ 146,790
Brokerage				\$ 2,337	\$ 1,180	\$ 4,675
Prior Period Unexpended Funds		\$ 102,164	\$ 111,877	\$ 121,176	\$ 140,403	\$ 107,595
Total Funding		\$ 248,049	\$ 252,961	\$ 272,055	\$ 299,963	\$ 259,060
Expenditure						
Labour		\$ 86,299	\$ 90,998	\$ 86,791	\$ 125,918	\$ 134,077
All Other		\$ 49,873	\$ 40,787	\$ 44,861	\$ 66,450	\$ 63,068
Total Expenditure		\$ 136,172	\$ 131,785	\$ 131,652	\$ 192,367	\$ 197,144
Surplus / (Deficit)		\$ 111,877	\$ 121,176	\$ 140,403	\$ 107,595	\$ 61,916
Staffing						
FTE - Contract		1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2
FTE - Organisational Budget		1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.2
Accordwest % Utilisation of Unexpended Funds (FTE)		-14%	-8%	-10%	-11%	4%
FTE Assumptions						
Case Workers		0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9
Team Leaders & Support		0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
Total FTE		1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.2
FTE - Case Worker To Support Ratio %		87%	82%	83%	84%	72%
Capes Accommodation Support and Advocacy Services (CASA)						
Client Activity (In Calendar Years - Per SHIP Reporting)						
		<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	
Average Active Support Periods / Clients Over The Year		8	10	15	14	
Total New Support Periods in Year		80	67	96	88	
Average Duration of Support Period		37	56	55	57	
Unassisted Clients						
By Request						
		<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	
Other Housing or Accommodation Request / Not Stated			8	32	56	
Accommodation - Short Term / Emergency Accommodation		5	3	10	36	
General Assistance and Support (Including Specialised Services)		7	1	5	13	
Total Unassisted Clients By Request		12	12	47	105	
By Unassisted Reason						
		<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	
Other / Not Stated		2	5	24	52	
Person Did Not Accept Service		4	5	10	24	
Outside Agency's Services		4	1	6	23	
No Accommodation Available		2	1	7	6	
Total Unassisted Clients By Reason		12	12	47	105	

Table 3.

Youth Accommodation Support Service - Including Bunvap (YASS Incl Bunvap)		Financial Year Ends				
Financial Operating Results		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 Budget
Funding						
Annual Funding		\$ 1,000,838	\$ 963,143	\$ 1,024,788	\$ 1,076,057	983,376.00
Brokerage						
Prior Period Unexpended Funds		\$ 6,064	\$ 95,729	\$ 99,914	\$ 132,448	\$ 124,056
Total Funding		\$ 1,006,902	\$ 1,058,872	\$ 1,124,702	\$ 1,208,505	\$ 1,107,432
Expenditure						
Labour		\$ 580,763	\$ 750,136	\$ 722,265	\$ 829,785	\$ 745,550
All Other		\$ 330,409	\$ 208,822	\$ 269,989	\$ 254,664	\$ 297,409
Total Expenditure		\$ 911,173	\$ 958,958	\$ 992,254	\$ 1,084,449	\$ 1,042,958
Surplus / (Deficit)		\$ 95,729	\$ 99,914	\$ 132,448	\$ 124,056	\$ 64,474
Staffing						
FTE - Contract		7.4	7.4	7.4	7.4	7.4
FTE - Organisational Budget		6.1	6.7	6.3	5.9	6.3
Accordwest % Utilisation of Unexpended Funds (FTE)		-18%	-10%	-15%	-21%	-16%
FTE Assumptions						
Case Workers		3.6	4.2	3	3.2	3.4
Team Leaders & Support		2.5	2.5	3.3	2.7	2.9
Total FTE		6.1	6.7	6.3	5.9	6.3
FTE - Case Worker To Support Ratio %		59%	63%	47%	54%	54%
Youth Accommodation Support Service - Including Bunvap (YASS Incl Bunvap)						
Client Activity (In Calendar Years - Per SHIP Reporting)						
		2018	2019	2020	2021	
Average Active Support Periods / Clients Over The Year		25	22	29	26	
Total New Support Periods in Year		202	109	173	115	
Average Duration of Support Period		45	73	61	84	
Unassisted Clients						
By Request						
		2018	2019	2020	2021	
Accommodation - Short Term / Emergency Accomodation		13	32	58	102	
Other Housing or Accommodation Request / Not Stated		14	14	40	97	
General Assistance and Support (Including Specialised Services)		1	2	2	32	
Total Unassisted Clients By Request		28	48	100	231	
By Unassisted Reason						
		2018	2019	2020	2021	
Other / Not Stated		6	32	39	68	
Person Did Not Accept Service		7	14	27	66	
Outside Agency's Services		9	1	5	61	
No Accommodation Available		6	1	29	36	
Total Unassisted Clients By Reason		28	48	100	231	

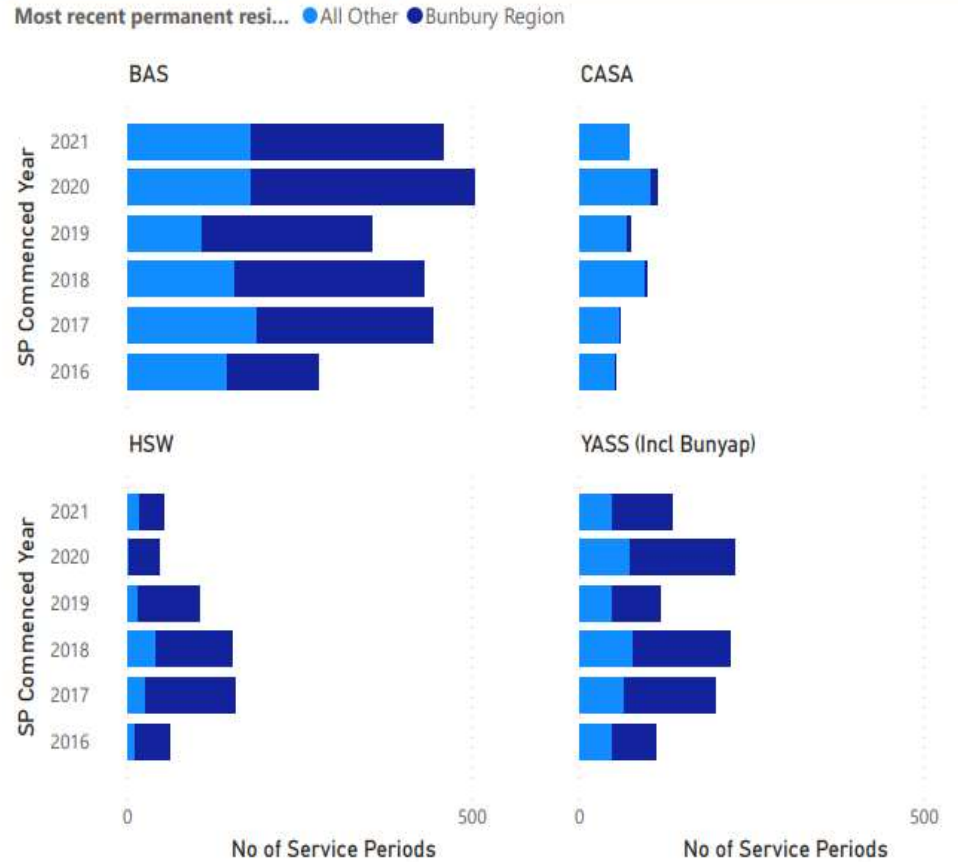
Table 4.

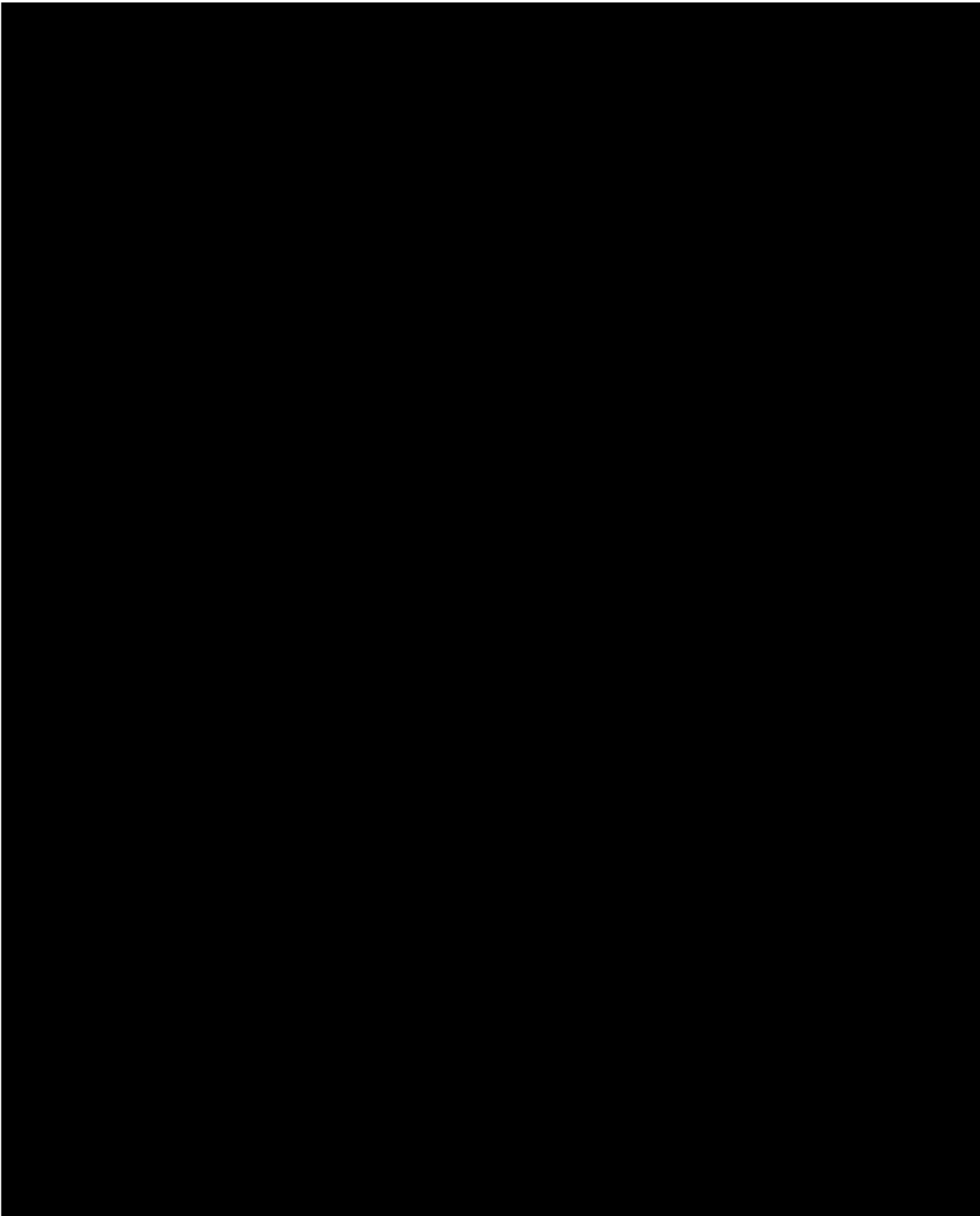
Homelessness Housing Support Workers – South West (HSW)		Financial Year Ends				
Financial Operating Results		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
		Budget				
Funding						
Annual Funding		\$ 312,960	\$ 317,300	\$ 318,878	\$ 324,204	\$ 334,050
Brokerage				\$ 3,600	\$ 4,173	\$ 9,847
Prior Period Unexpended Funds		\$ 396,995	\$ 401,739	\$ 430,085	\$ 486,020	\$ 485,401
Total Funding		\$ 709,955	\$ 719,039	\$ 752,563	\$ 814,397	\$ 829,298
Expenditure						
Labour		\$ 203,458	\$ 229,364	\$ 204,392	\$ 267,257	\$ 333,004
All Other		\$ 104,758	\$ 59,590	\$ 62,151	\$ 61,739	\$ 105,611
Total Expenditure		\$ 308,215	\$ 288,954	\$ 266,543	\$ 328,995	\$ 438,615
Surplus / (Deficit)		\$ 401,739	\$ 430,085	\$ 486,020	\$ 485,401	\$ 390,683
Staffing						
FTE - Contract		2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4
FTE - Organisational Budget		2.6	2.9	2.9	2.8	3.2
Accordwest % Utilisation of Unexpended Funds (FTE)		7%	22%	20%	17%	35%
FTE Assumptions						
Case Workers		2.1	2.4	2.2	2.1	2.5
Team Leaders & Support		0.5	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.7
Total FTE		2.6	2.9	2.9	2.8	3.2
FTE - Case Worker To Support Ratio %		82%	82%	77%	75%	77%
Homelessness Housing Support Workers – South West (HSW)						
Client Activity (In Calendar Years - Per SHIP Reporting)						
		2018	2019	2020	2021	
Average Active Support Periods / Clients Over The Year		21	21	16	16	
Total New Support Periods in Year		134	90	45	48	
Average Duration of Support Period		58	86	127	119	
Unassisted Clients						
By Request						
Other Housing or Accommodation Request / Not Stated		11	31	15	41	
Total Unassisted Clients By Request		11	31	15	41	
By Unassisted Reason						
Outside Agency's Services		3	2	4	21	
Other / Not Stated		8	25	7	9	
No Accommodation Available			1		6	
Person Did Not Accept Service			3	4	5	
Total Unassisted Clients By Reason		11	31	15	41	

Table 5

No of Service Periods By Locality							
Most recent permanent residential address - Locality Group Bunbury	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Bunbury Region	247	520	532	414	531	403	2,647
Bunbury	206	434	434	342	443	336	2,195
Bunbury Greater	41	86	98	72	88	67	452
All Other	257	341	372	240	360	320	1,890
Busselton	104	71	109	85	97	87	553
Perth	25	63	74	39	56	31	288
Collie	18	34	32	26	51	69	230
Other Regional South West	28	32	46	31	40	34	211
Other Regional WA	19	38	23	23	44	30	177
Donnybrook	14	27	21	4	10	13	89
Interstate	10	24	15	8	21	10	88
Not Stated	18	6	25	4	13	17	83
Mandurah Region	6	18	11	5	10	12	62
Margaret River / Augusta	13	16	10	5	6	7	57
Capel	2	12	6	10	12	10	52
Total	504	861	904	654	891	723	4,537

No of Service Periods by SP Commenced Year, Most recent permanent residential address - Locality Group Bunbury and Program Combined





Our solutions focus

Accordwest is motivated by the reform and change process and we are actively preparing and participating. We are anticipating signing new contracts and continuing the journey by engaging in further co design workshops with the department and our colleagues in the South West from July 2022.

We support the approach for each contracted service to be realigned to strategy, for contracts to be simplified and reformed to target significant improvements in homelessness services and to improve the of these supports. Through the trial period, alongside many other opportunities offered by whole of government policy, Accordwest is well positioned to help more people using new methods and techniques that are in early stages of design. Our recent experiences are cause for optimism.

- Recently the South West Development Commission funded the Tiny home (houses) initiative, it is working very well with 9 homeless people being supported in less than a year.
- It is also encouraging to be in a position to help more people into refurbished housing with \$1.4M Sherp grants that Accordwest and other providers across Greater Bunbury and the South West are being provided in 2022.
- We have applied for Sherp New Build Grants and will put our name forward for similar initiatives that add to the stock of affordable and social housing

Substantially more investment by Government is needed as the shortfall state-wide and in the South West will not be made up by the current funding set aside by the State and Federal governments alone.

Boundaries and limitations

The perverse housing building supply and labour shortages in Australia, also seen worldwide, have a significant impact on the people of Greater Bunbury and the South West, on Accordwest and on other service providers in the region. Accordwest expect the shortage of social and affordable housing to be the main cause of homelessness in our context for the foreseeable future. The redirection of government funds to additional grants and subsidies to social and affordable housing is essential.

It is anticipated that more marginalised and economically disadvantaged people will seek services from Accordwest and others as the 2022 year progresses and that as a result, operational demands and impacts will put further strains on service systems and providers.

The Government and the Department is asking Accordwest and its partners and colleagues in the region to pivot the service system at a time of global uncertainty and global and local disruption. Accordwest and the sector has the intrinsic and philosophical drive to reform and believes it can achieve reform provided the essential levels of financial support are kept in place including support for psychologically safe work practices and workplaces. Should the demand grow further it is equally important that funding increase as needed and justified. The expectations of leverage of NGOs by all levels of Federal and State government have increased at the same time as volunteerism has declined. Plans for funding and new inclusions in contracts must take this outlook into serious consideration. Current funding models do not provide new money for business development, business case preparations and time for the leadership and a volunteer board to engage in providing solutions. Accordwest and others need further government support to be successful in the current context. In our view the people, systems, process reforms all need to be led with the appropriate smartness and pace of change management and much needed investment in our people. Our People important to the success of the reforms and they are at risk of burnout.

An example of a cost that could have been funded was the cost of preparing Sherp Grant applications for over 30 properties leased by the Department of Communities to Accordwest, the cost exceeded \$30K, the Grant conditions did not permit the entity to recover these costs and the Grant required an external

project manager be appointed to deliver the results. Internal project management costs and administration costs are not covered. This is a burden the Organisation was willing to take while it is in a fortunate position however in future, expectations for leveraging the balance sheet of AccordWest may not be met. It is recommended that Social housing providers be funded and provided support to participate to grow the supply of housing not be asked to subsidise processes.

At time when there is a worker shortage in Australia, WA and the South West region, Housing Case worker and Accommodation workers across all our services and support departments result in service shortfalls and we are incurring unplanned and unfunded costs for recruitment and training. We are urgently investing to promote, reward, train, retain and motivate experienced and effective homelessness and housing sector workers and attract new employees into community service as the competition for talented people who are willing to work in the sector increases. Many experienced workers have chosen to move to other workplaces, to roles with more certain employment contracts and prospects and in some cases, to other sectors offering salaries well above what we are able to pay within the funding we are provided.

Funding to maintain and grow a workforce to plan for and develop and provide social and affordable housing solutions is needed.

Organisational and sector capability and capacity

With a dynamic history and considerable experience in providing homelessness and housing services to youth and adults and families in Greater Bunbury and the South West Accordwest has been and is committed to develop and grow the place based expertise in our field. It has an ongoing commitment to meet higher expectations and to work more closely as partners with the Department, other sector services providers, local community groups and multiple levels of government.

Accordwest has worked closely with many service departments and at multiple levels of the Federal, State and Local government for many years. We are an organisation with an interrelated understanding of the needs of vulnerable people and Aboriginal and Torres Straight island people who are overrepresented in the population of homeless. Accordwest have developed a deep understanding of the community we live in and as many of us originated from the region, we are able to view a person's story over a long period of their lifetime. We have a history of supporting people some people when they were children, youth and as adults with families and we have helped many people into a better position to access housing and not become homeless as they have built a future as engaged community members feeling they belong in the Greater Bunbury and the South West region.

All the regions housing and homelessness service providers are closely connected to many community service groups and Aboriginal controlled organisations across the region and it is often the case that the workers that have grown up with their family in the region will move from one social services organisation to another. A number of the members of the sector workforce have lived experience with homelessness or have been at risk of homelessness and have been provided services when they and their families most needed support by the service organisations based in the region. Some of these individuals worked at or are working at Accordwest alongside people who we employ as highly qualified and experienced experts in housing and homelessness service design and systems. A number of our employees have worked and led teams in overseas housing support service models that are similar to the model that Australia aspires to bring into place.

Accordwest understands from the way the community engages with us that it plays a key role in solving homelessness in the South West. In addition to these reforms, we seek to engage in intensive and innovative collaboration and investment in social and affordable housing as we believe this will contribute substantially to solving the problems and provide tangible and real results, it will demonstrate to the community that the goal of achieving zero homelessness is achievable.

The bigger picture

Accordwest understands that all Paths lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030 requires mutual accountability and unity of purpose from all levels of government and from all political parties. We understand that the Department and other State government services and departments play critical roles in the lives of many of the people we serve. It is essential for the success of the trial that each organisation involved has a clearer understanding of the specialist homeless service provider's role, capabilities and capacities and understand the services we are contracted to provide, in addition to this, they have expectations of us and the people we serve that are realistic.

Government and Departmental messaging and communications at numerous levels greatly assists the people we serve and our team in our day to day work. We interact with multiple state and federal government bodies to navigate a way forward for the people in need and it is important the entire sector are fully aware and engaged with the changes being put in place by the Government and the department. As providers our role in the change process and communication process must be well defined and supported. We also need all government departments to adjust to manage services differently during the trial and ongoing and it is essential that Accordwest and the other providers be brought into their plans for reform as well, regional providers should not be left outside of the planning, coordination and communication spheres when others make their changes.

Accordwest is concerned that the trial will be construed as failing and may not provide the positive and constructive feedback and learning that is needed to propel the sector forward state-wide. Accordwest is concerned that the providers that have been invited to participate in the trial are not sufficiently resourced to take part in the trial and as a group we will be seen to have failed if the problem of housing and homelessness is not resolved.

At the heart of it all, we feel that numerous more affordable places to live are needed in the Greater Bunbury and South West Region. The key risk is that not enough new social and affordable homes will be commissioned and built by Government or be provided by the private market or other providers and therefore become available soon nor along the way to 2024/25.

The total supply of housing stock to reduce the problem adequately is not in the control of Accordwest and other homelessness service system providers, the providers individually and collectively do not currently have much if any influence on addressing this vast social and economic problem and shortfall. At present this risk impacts the trial and contract delivery and is therefore a significant reputational and operational risk to Accordwest and other service providers over the period of the trial.

Communication Strategy and being realistic

Accordwest asks that along with contracting the homelessness system support services trial across the South West that the department review and align its investments in a range of solutions to the housing shortages across the Greater Bunbury and South West region and that these decisions be made in a timely and effective manner.

We ask that all the Greater Bunbury and South West regional service providers and others who touch on homelessness be consulted further and be urgently included and funded to address the large deficit in social and affordable housing supply and we be involved in the conversations surrounding the related problems and solutions. We request that the department provide a unified and joined up public and social housing solutions with consistent and well-orchestrated communications across the Greater Bunbury and South West region stating what it will do and cannot do or does not have capacity to achieve over the time period of the trial in Greater Bunbury and the South West.

It is acknowledged that constructive and productive conversations about how we provide homelessness service support and also contribute to solving the housing supply crisis across Greater Bunbury and the South West between the departments will be understanding of our Regional context. Announcements for more supply made to date are encouraging for the Metro areas although they are not benefiting the Greater Bunbury and the South West and they are not yet supportive of our teams achieving more.

Strategic repositioning

From early 2021 Accordwest undertook a detailed review of current processes and systems as well as the structure of the housing and homelessness services teams. It identified and developed an understanding of new practices that it expects specialist homelessness and housing services will be required to put in place into the future. Our review was aimed at guiding strategic planning and to realign what Accordwest does each day with the housing first strategy and more recently, with the commissioning strategy conversations and planning underway from late September.

We believed it best to get on with making the changes and to start learning as soon as we could. The focus above been on providing genuine service and better supports to the people of Greater Bunbury and the South West that Accordwest serves. We are managing the ongoing historically low level of social housing and shortage and low level of availability of affordable accommodation across the region. Accordwest have now restructured the service and are now strategically positioning to deliver higher quality housing and homelessness supports that achieve long term outcomes. We are seeking to negotiate increasing our presence across the South West Communities we serve where needed.

We aim to seek registration and to grow to achieve the status of a Tier 2 Social housing provider with a view to becoming a Tier 1 provider in the longer term. We are ambitious and we see the needs are not likely to be met without organisations such as Accordwest increasing and intensifying our participation and efforts.

Accordwest also seeks to negotiate greater flexibility for the housing stock associated with the existing contracts to optimise the management and maintenance of the properties, ensuring assets remain safe and liveable, extending the life of assets and providing long term security in the housing stock available to the most vulnerable members of our communities.

Accordwest is committed to working in partnership with the Department and all contracted and new and emerging service providers to ensure a no-wrong door, person-centred, place-based approach to service delivery. We are supportive of the implementation of a common triage and assessment tool, however, are not supportive of one central intake hub for services across the region. We see opportunities to increase information availability and to provide information asymmetry to stimulate ideas and creativity to drive new solutions to the problems faced and see the increased promotion of knowledge systems across multiple networks as a critical pathway to the services of government and the Sector so we are all more effective and helpful to people wherever they are living or choose to live.

Practicalities

A central intake hub or regional service hub is not in our view a wholly practical solution, a number of service centres across a wide geographic area are needed as it is likely increase accessibility for those in need who live in smaller and more remote communities across the region e.g. to those with limited public transport options or as disabled people and where people are financially constrained. A high degree of centralisation will more likely than less likely create barriers to access to the right supports at the right time. Accordwest backs the people we serve being able to access the right information and services in the right place at the right time regardless of which provider or information source they choose to interact with initially. If needed they are referred efficiently and with the right sensitivity to information sources and the service provider/s who can help them best.

A choice of high quality self-service responses and services should also be made available to people in need as should be the required personalised responses. Knowledge systems and self-service models and applications that have greater reach and meet bespoke local community needs will most likely provide a much needed move forward for many but not all of those in need of help. We believe self-service tools and systems that free up case management resources for redistribution of time to those who need personalised help the most. Moreover, the homeless circumstances people may find themselves in are very private and personal and it is important to cater for the way many families and individuals choose to engage in the service systems and models of the future.

Accordwest supports and are investing in clever use of ICT and mobile technologies and other on line services to deliver the supports needed in more remote parts of the region and to reach people who are not able to travel or prefer to access or choose to receive services in these ways. We support and are investing in remote working technology and conferencing systems and are also making arrangements to work in shared offices and co located space across the region. Our pool vehicle fleet is being reviewed to locate vehicles where they can be used in more efficient and effective ways, so our workforce can travel and reach out across the region to offer appointments dates and pop up services and face to face appointments to the people we serve. Many need this support locally, we also seek to work alongside our colleagues in the sector and other organisations to share our understanding and knowledge and to target opportunities and solutions with them, which will assist the homelessness support systems to be distributed across an effective network.

We support the expansion of the Housing First Homelessness Initiative to reach across the region and capture details about those sleeping without shelter. We are enthusiastic for housing initiatives such as Common Ground and for a significant increase in aboriginal housing services supply across the Greater Bunbury and South West region. Accordwest is keen to partner with the relevant providers and stakeholders and assist by sharing data in a desensitised way and by collecting new data and feedback to expand and improve current and future programs and social housing solutions. Accordwest feel that correctly sized and scaled common ground initiatives or similar developments can be substantiated for a number of locations across the Greater Bunbury and South West region where studies are advanced to the front of the agenda in the first ½ of 2022.

Having said all this, Accordwest cannot sustain an effective place based model of service without significant support and investment from Government, that funding is likely to be more for a period of time, until the synergies and new contemporary service system is in place.

Closing the Gap

Accordwest is committed to the Closing the Gap targets and is actively providing and continuously improving the culturally safe and appropriate services provided to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients across Bunbury and the South West. Over the 2021 year an Aboriginal Development officer and an Aboriginal Mentor have been employed. A Cultural Advisor provides cultural advice to support to clients and employees across all service areas as well. Accordwest is implementing quality cultural awareness training to all staff and this has been effective in many changes to services and is changing the perceptions of our services. A Culture and Diversity subcommittee has been established by the Board with a focus on engagement and reconciliation. The most important result is that the Aboriginal employment policy with assertive action has resulted in a large increase in the number of aboriginal people working in our one integrated team across Children and Youth Services (Out of home care), Programs for Homelessness and housing and emergency relief as well as Reintegration and AOD services for prisoners.

Our Board, Executive and many employees are connected with local aboriginal leaders of ACCOS and many important community Elders. We are actively building our capacity as an organisation to provide homelessness support solutions in a partnership to all culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

Our presence in the communities across Greater Bunbury and the South West provides a unique partnership opportunity with new and existing ACCO service providers, Elders and the community to implement effective and innovative housing solutions alongside them.

Accordwest encourages the department to help establish a separate fully funded service through an ACCO and a direct service for housing and homelessness supports to Aboriginal clients across the region. In addition to this, the expansion of existing or established aboriginal housing providers and as needed the start-up of new bodies across the region with new money and grants to provide social and affordable housing to aboriginal people. This we expect will provide the additional support needed to balance the demands on current service provision across the region as they will be best placed to provide the culturally safe and secure opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the region to find a new home and retain a place. We are ready and willing to assist in the process of supporting these service to be successful if we are approached to.

We believe this action by government will have a direct impact on closing the gap.

Encouraging innovation

As a well-connected community focused organisation, Accordwest is committed to delivering services which provide sustainable outcomes for individuals and to improve the live-ability of our communities, planning is not an innovation per se although planning that delivers housing for Accordwest and other providers to place people into is critical.

Well-resourced partnership and collaborative efforts with the Department, other service providers, social entrepreneurs and the private sector and multiple levels of government such as regional and city councils are key to finding solutions to the current housing crisis. Central to this is our ability to support solutions with community involvement also improving supports to vulnerable people, this adds considerable value to the lives of contributing community members as well. Long term sustainable forms of community and social housing assets across the region can be generated from on the ground work.

The Bunbury and South West region is expansive, important to maintaining a diverse WA economy and is growing at a significant rate and the \$ investment amounts provided to resolving the issues we face do not appear to have been keeping up with the pace of growth so we and others can service a wider geographical area e.g. Bunbury (66K) to Greater Bunbury (87K) a 15% growth over the last 10 years, as a result of the Greater Bunbury strategy. More people are now choosing to live and are moving to the inland and coastal localities and it is evident that many homeless people and people at risk of homelessness are migrating and seeking affordable accommodation across the region because they are displaced by rental increases and property availability and affordability in metro areas and in other places.

To be able to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service, Accordwest need to negotiate with the Department a bespoke approach to innovation with our practice models and housing solutions in mind.

It is very important to look at how resources and the funding model support change and innovation and meet up with housing supply.

Thankyou

Thank you to the Parliament and Government of Western Australia for your consideration and support and to the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee for your willingness to listen represent and assist the people we serve. It is a significant morale boost to know that you are all willing to invest the time and effort needed. Thank you also for allowing additional time for this submission to be provided.